

Message Text

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S E C R E T BUENOS AIRES 6276

EXDIS

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TAGS: PFOR, SHUM, AR, US

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES US-ARGENTINE RELATIONS WITH PRESIDENT VIDELA

RER: (A) BUENOS AIRES 6177, (B) STATE 227379, (C) STATE 231122

1. AS REPORTED IN REF A, PRESIDENT VIDELA RECEIVED ME AT 11:15 A.M. YESTERDAY, SEPT 21 AND I WAS WITH HIM ABOUT AN HOUR AND A HALF. I OPENED CONVERSATION BY GOING DIRECTLY INTO HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE. I TOLD HIM OF GREAT CONCERN I HAD FOUND IN US. THERE WAS, I SAID, GREAT SYMPATHY FOR HIS GOVERNMENT, WHICH HAD TAKEN OVER UNDER DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES AND WHICH ALL UNDERSTOOD TO BE INVOLVED IN STRUGGLE TO THE DEATH WITH LEFT-WING SUBVERSION. HOWEVER, SUCH THINGS AS THE MURDER OF THE PRIESTS AND THE MASS MURDERGET PILAR WERE SERIOUSLY DAMAGING ARGENTINA'S IMAGE IN THE US. US WAS SERIOUSLY CONCERNED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE NOT JUST IN ARGENTINA BUT AROUND THE WORLD, AND WE NOW HAVE LEGISLATION UNDER WHICH NO COUNTRY DETERMINED TO BE CONSISTENTLY GUILTY OF GROSS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS CAN BE ELIGIBLE FOR ANY FORM OF US ASSISTANCE, BE IT ECONOMIC OR MILITARY. I EXPLAINED TO HIM WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF HARKIN AMENDMENT WERE INVOKED AGAINST ARGENTINA (SEE REF B). I TOLD HIM, HOWEVER, THAT FOR THE MOMENT THIS HAD BEEN AVOIDED. US WOULD VOTE FOR ARGENTINE LOAN IN IDB (I EXPLAINED THAT QUESTION OF INTEREST RATES FOR SOME PORTIONS OF LOAN HAD STILL TO BE RESOLVED BUT THAT THIS NOT RELATED TO HARKIN AMENDMENT). I TOLD PRESIDENT FRANKLY, HOWEVER, THAT I SAW THIS VOTE AS PROBABLY LAST TIME US WOULD

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BE ABLE TO AVOID INVOKING AMENDMENT AGAINST ARGENTINA UNLESS

RPT UNLESS GOA MOVED QUICKLY TO DEMONSTRATE IT IS TAKING MEASURES TO GET HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN HAND. I POINTED OUT THAT SO FAR AS I KNEW, NOT ONE SINGLE PERSON HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO JUSTICE OR EVEN DISCIPLINED FOR EXCESSES OF WHICH ELEMENTS OF SECURITY FORCES HAVE BEEN GUILTY. I ALSO POINTED OUT TO HIM HUMAN RIGHTS PROVISIONS OF NEW SECURITY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION (SEE REFTTEL C) AND INDICATED URUGUAY HAD ALREADY LOST THREE MILLION DOLLARS IN MILITARY AID BECAUSE OF IT. I PROMISED TO SENT TEXTS OF PERTINENT PROVISIONS OF NEW SECURITY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION AND HARKIN AMENDMENT TO FOREIGN MINISTRY.

2. PRESIDENT THANKED ME FOR FRANK EXPOSITION OF PROBLEM AND EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR US AFFIRMATIVE VOTE IN IDB. HE SAID HE HAD BEEN OUTRAGED BY THE MURDERS AT PILAR WHICH, INDEED, HAD BEEN AN AFFRONT TO HIS GOVT.

3. I ASKED, THEN, IF ANY SANCTIONS WERE GOING TO BE TAKEN AGAINST THOSE RESPONSIBLE, THUS SHOWING THAT HIS GOVT DID NOT CONDONE SUCH ACTS. VIDELA AVOIDED REPLY. I SUGGESTED THAT, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, BEST WAY TO PROCEED AGAINST TERRORISTS WAS WITHIN LAW. AND WHY, I ASKED, DID NOT GOA USE EXISTING COURT SYSTEM TO BRING MEMBERS OF FORMER GOVT TO TRIAL, INSTEAD OF LEAVING THEM IN PRISON WITHOUT CHARGES.

4. VIDELA DID NOT ANSWER EITHER QUESTION; RATHER, HE LAUNCHED INTO LONG EXPOSITION OF DIFFICULT SITUATION HIS GOVT HAD INHERITED. ECONOMY HAD BEEN ON THE ROCKS AND TERRORISM RAMPANT. FURTHER, HE SAID, ARGENTINA WAS NOW AT WAR WITH INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM, WHICH, THROUGH PENETRATION OF THE SCHOOLS AND EVEN THE CHURCH, HAD BEEN ON VERGE OF TAKEOVER. ALTHOUGH HE HAD EARLIER DEPLORED TO ME MASS MURDER AT PILAR, CERTAIN OF HIS SUBSEQUENT STATEMENTS SUGGESTED THAT HE VIEWS KILLINGS OF SOME LEFTISTS AS GOOD OBJECT LESSON.

5. HE SAID GOVT WAS TAKING ACTION TO CONTROL PROBLEM OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN ARGENTINA. HE SAID HE THOUGHT PROBLEM HAD BEEN EXAGGERATED, BUT THAT GOA WANTS NONE OF THAT SORT OF THING AND HAS ISSUED DECREE BANNING NAZI-SYMPATHIZING PUBLICATIONS WHICH WERE PRINCIPALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR STIMULATING ANTI-SEMITISM.

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6. PRESIDENT SAID HE HAD BEEN GRATIFIED WHEN FONMIN GUZZETTI REPORTED TO HIM THAT SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER UNDERSTOOD THEIR PROBLEM AND HAD SAID HE HOPED THEY COULD GET TERRORISM UNDER CONTROL AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. VIDELA SAID HE HAD IMPRESSION SENIOR OFFICERS OF USG UNDERSTOOD SITUATION HIS GOVT FACES BUT JUNIOR BUREAUCRATS DO NOT. I ASSURED HIM THIS WAS NOT THE CASE. WE ALL HOPE ARGENTINA CAN GET TERRORISM UNDER CONTROL QUICKLY--BUT DO SO IN SUCH A WAY AS TO DO

MINIMUM DAMAGE TO ITS IMAGE AND TO ITS RELATIONS WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS. IF SECURITY FORCES CONTINUE TO KILL PEOPLE TO TUNE OF BRASS BAND, I CONCLUDED, THIS WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE. I TOLD HIM SECRETARY OF STATE HAD TOLD ME WHEN I WAS IN US THAT HE WANTED TO AVOID HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM IN ARGENTINA.

7. VIDELA REPLIED THAT HIS GOVT, TOO, WISHED TO AVOID SUCH A PROBLEM. NOTHING, HE SAID, MUST BE ALLOWED TO UPSET GOOD RELATIONS WITH US.

8. I ASKED WHAT HIS GOVT'S ATTITUDE WOULD BE IF CONGRESSMAN KOCK WISHED TO VISIT ARGENTINA? VIDELA ASSURED ME HIS GOVT WOULD POSE NO OBJECTIONS TO SUCH A VISIT. LET THE CONGRESSMAN COME AND SEE FOR HIMSELF, HE CONCLUDED.

9. VIDELA EXPRESSED MARKED CONCERN OVER FIRE AT NEW CHANCERY SITE (SEE SEPTELS) AND ASKED ME FOR ALL THE DETAILS.

10. PRESIDENT TOLD ME GENERAL MIRO, ARGENTINE MILATT IN WASHINGTON, WHO PRESIDENT SAID WAS CLASSMATE AND CLOSE FRIEND OF HIS, HAD CALLED HIM FROM US TO EXPRESS CONCERN OVER IMPACT MUSICH RESIGNATION MIGHT HAVE. MIRO HAD ASKED IF MUSICH DEPARTURE MEANT THAT ECONOMIC MISSION AROUND MUSICH WOULD ALSO GO AND THERE WOULD BE CHANGE OF POLICY. PRESIDENT SAID HE HAD ASSURED MIRO THAT THIS NOT THE CASE. ECONOMIC TEAM IN WASHINGTON WILL STAY AND THERE WILL BE NO CHANGE OF POLICY.

11. OTHER ITEMS RAISED IN DISCUSSION WERE REPORTED IN REFTEL A SEPT 21.

12. COMMENT: I CAME AWAY FROM MEETING WITH VIDELA SOMEWHAT DISCOURAGED. HE SAYS HE WANTS TO AVOID PROBLEMS WITH US
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BUT HE GAVE NO INDICATION THAT HE INTENDS TO MOVE AGAINST THOSE ELEMENTS IN SECURITY FORCES WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUTRAGES--AND THUS BEGIN TO GET SITUATION IN HAND. INDEED, HE MAY NOT BE IN ANY POSITION TO SO MOVE. I CAME AWAY WITH VERY STRONG IMPRESSION THAT VIDELA IS NOT IN CHARGE, THAT HE IS NOT THE BOSS AND KNOWS HE IS NOT. HE IS PROBABLY NOT GOING TO MOVE AGAINST HARDLINERS. HE IS A DECENT, WELL-INTENTIONED MAN, BUT HIS WHOLE STYLE IS ONE OF DIFFIDENCE AND EXTREME CAUTION. IN THE PRESENT SITUATION, MORE ASSERTIVENESS THAN HE CAN PROVIDE MAY BE NEEDED TO GET HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION UNDER CONTROL.
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